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EL SALVADOR: Prospects for Rightist Coup

*There are indications that the increasingly dominant right-wing military officers may move against the governing junta.*

Centrist junta member and armed forces chief Colonel Gutierrez reportedly is convinced that the momentum for a rightwing coup is growing. Although uncertain he would prevail, Gutierrez planned to ask yesterday for a vote of confidence from top military commanders.

officers nonetheless believe that the only critical obstacle to a coup is the hesitation of National Guard Commander Colonel Vides Casanova, to whom rightist officers look for leadership. Vides may be unwilling to act at this time because of concern over the international effect of a coup.

The cogoverning Christian Democrats agree that the government needs restructuring. In line with what they view as the prevailing mood in the military, they also are pushing for the ouster of liberal junta member Colonel Majano. Although concerned over the growing power of rightist military officers and over human rights abuses by the security forces, the Christian Democrats' past acceptance of the political supremacy of the armed forces argues for further efforts to avoid a confrontation with the military.

Violence by the security forces is likely to increase in the wake of the murders last week of six leaders of the far left's Revolutionary Democratic Front. Many middle and senior grade officers as well as the Minister and sub-Minister of Defense are said to support such tactics against the left.

In response to the killings, far left insurgents hope to revitalize their dwindling popular support by organizing street demonstrations and by stepping up terrorist attacks on military posts in the capital. The funeral ceremony for the slain leftists was peaceful, however, and attracted only some 2,000 onlookers--far below leftist predictions.

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